

Teaching Food Agency Through Inquiry and Action

Introduction

What is the goal of teaching people how to cook? Our research team has developed a cooking pedagogy to enhance “food agency.” To possess food agency is to be *empowered to act* throughout the course of planning and preparing of meals within a particular food environment. It is an *embodied ability*, dependent on a complex matrix of cognitive, perceptual, and mechanical skills, and is mediated by the larger social and physical contexts in which it takes place. In our on-going research, we seek to refine the pedagogy, to facilitate students in both learning to cook and gaining agency around their practices.

Methods

Our interdisciplinary, mixed-methods and multi-institution collaborative project arose from ten years of teaching in the University of Vermont’s Foods Lab, using this emergent pedagogy.

Structure of Course: Testing Ground of the Pedagogy

- 4– 10 weeks
- 3 hours per week of active learning in a kitchen environment
- Repeated techniques building over time, with new concepts introduced each week
- Development of more technical and navigational skills, tested by more complex meal preparation tasks over time

Results: Food Agency Pedagogy

Distinguishing Principles

- *Embodied knowledge* of food preparation as the objective
- *Inquiry* as the educational philosophy

Learning Goals

- Develop a *skillful* cooking practice
- Identify and navigate the *full cycle of actions* necessary in making a meal
- Appreciate and analyze *sensory components of food and the social benefits of shared meals*
- Increase *self-efficacy* in meal preparation
- Develop the capacity to move from *idea*, to *action*, to *result* for multiple recipes

Mechanisms for Skilled Action

- Repetition
- Precision/Exactitude
- Awareness
- In-situ Problem Solving
- Mistake Recovery and Reconciliation
- Manipulating Technology
- Visualization of Steps to Attain Ends
- Social Relations
- Mindful Sensory Engagement

Accumulation Over Time

- Knife skills
- Heat transfer
- Mise en place
- Backward sequencing/timing
- Sensory awareness and palate solving
- Problem-solving for the full cycle of actions
- Literacy in identifying ingredients and appropriate cooking techniques
- Ease of planning and execution

TABBOULEH

Boil water (about 10 minutes)
Gather materials/ingredients
Stir bulgur & olive oil in “heat proof bowl”

Start preparing vegetables & herbs
Pour 1 cup of the boiling water over bulgur & cover
Timer (15 minutes) +

Finish preparing vegetables & herbs
Make vinaigrette

Drain bulgur – put in bowl
Toss with vinaigrette & salt & pepper
Stir in the rest of ingredients



Mise en place drawing created by a UVM undergraduate.

This research is the result of an over decade long research collaboration between University of Vermont researchers and teachers along with collaborators at Virginia Tech and University of Michigan. The research team now includes experts and graduate students from the fields of education, anthropology, nutrition, public health, food science and food systems. Researchers (in alphabetical order): Cynthia Belliveau, Stephanie Bostic, Maria Carabello, Jean Harvey, Shauna Henley, Jacob Lahne, Caitlin B. Morgan, Lizzy Pope, Amy Trubek and Julia Wolfson. *The initial design of this poster was completed by Maria Carabello and Caitlin Morgan.*



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